

Conference Paper

Street Art in the Context of the Historical Avant-garde

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to determine a role of historical avant-garde in forming a phenomenon of the modern culture as street-art. This study was carried out using a comparative, social and historical approaches. The revelation of connections and differences between practices of street-art and avant-garde was carried out according to following parameters such as a place of action, a specific character of the art process, its result (work), addressee/reference group, a social component. A number of peculiarities of street art, the origin of which is inspired by historical avant-garde. First of all, it is an urban art characterizing by maximum democratization and a social direction of art, removing art borders and a problem of the work of art quality.

At the same time the identity of street art with avant-garde is discourteous. Street art does not possess this attributive feature as utopia, it is realistic oriented to "here and now". Avant-garde idea of building a new world and a new man using art means is changed for less ambitious social practices directed to setting up the interaction with different reference groups. Radicalism of avant-garde lay not so much in the political sphere as aesthetic one. Radicalism of street art is connected with politicization. The novelties in the sphere of art forms of street art are not significant, they are connected with using new technologies. The results of this study showed that although street art is not avant-garde of the modern art but it is founded by the cultural field occurring due to historical avant-garde.

Keywords: avant-garde, relational art, social practice, street art, urbanism

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1. Introduction

Last decade is characterized by the rapid street art institutionalisation. Today street-art works are exhibited in the galleries, numerous street art exhibitions as well as festivals are arranged and even museums devoted to street art are appeared although the latter sounds like oxymoron. This marginal sort of activity is turned to a number of mixed but socially approved art practices (for example, public art, garden guerilla and

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so on). Nevertheless, street art is a subject of many discussions the topics of which are quite wide. They include its definitions and composition, its status clarification in the modern culture. There has been no common opinion about the essence of street art up to now if it is a social practice (it is quite often deviant) or it is still an art? In any case, philosophers and sociologists have been interested in street art more than art historians.

One of the discussed problems regarding which the researchers did not manage to come to the common opinion is a problem of the interrelation of street art and avant-garde. At first sight, the similarity of these phenomena of the culture is obvious. Street art dynamics, its youth, energy and sincerity, explicit and inexplicit protest potential, active use in the creative process by means of different technologies cause some associations concerning avant-garde art in many authors. But how rightful is the imagination regarding street art as about "elemental" or "non system" avant-garde of present days [9]. And in what circumstances can street art be pretended to take a vacant place of avant-garde in the modern art? The comparative analysis of the first historical avant-garde and street art allows to clarify street art position in the space of the modern art.

2. Avant-garde and Avant-gardes

Within XX century the topic of avant-garde has been discussed repeatedly. The conception of avant-garde is revived in the situation of the society crisis when the necessity of finding answers to some questions occurs. Neo avant-garde and post avant-garde were changed sequentially (1907-1937) but researchers did not manage to come to the common opinion regarding their authentic "avant-garde". Some researches [4] insist on the singularity of historical avant-garde phenomenon and consider this project to be closed. The others [7] consider the project to be incomplete, open which can be revived again in the modern art. No doubt, that "avant-gardes" are derivative from historical avant-garde and the latter is corresponded its modi as well as both Platonov world of eidoses and Platonov's world of shadows. If historical avant-garde is possessed by ideas of life building but neo avant-garde returns from the practice field in the art field, the borders of which are investigated enthusiastically. "The vanguard" of the modern art does not consider to be responsible for preparing the future world or informing it; today this art aims to "develop methods of existence or models of action inside the present reality" [2].

Tectonic shifts in the culture initiated by avant-garde art led to the changes of all culture space configuration and determined significantly the vectors of its further development. Historical avant-garde became a peculiar "new era", a turning point for the modern art. The appeal to it allows to clarify the senses of some phenomena of the modern art including street art. As for the temporal respect street art is close to post military avant-garde. Street art is unlikely to be appeared out of the cultural field inspired by historical avant-garde

Insufficient theoretical working out of street art (caused by not only its marginality but the fast development in combination with ephemeral works) is similar to the discussion about avant-garde which appears later after its occurrence in 1960 – 1970.

Just at this time marked works concerning avant-garde (P. Burger, B.Poggioly et al.) are published, although G.Rid, K.Greenberg, X.Ortega-i- Gasset studied these problems long before their publishing. Avant-garde is hidden under euphemism "new art" in the work "Dehumanisation of art" by X.Ortega-i-Gasset. Actually avant-garde has been "a figure of passing over in silence" for a long time, it has been present neither in self-awareness nor manifestos of those directions of art which we call "avant-garde" today. Like avant-garde, street art theoretical legalization as a component of the modern art is also late for several decades. Such works of S. Luison, K. MacKormic, T. Manko, P. Nguen et al. analyzing street art are dated by years 2000. I wonder that street art appeared in Z.Bodriyar' s field of vision early and it was reflected in one of his book chapters "Symbolic exchange and death" (1976).

Both avant-garde and street art are the examples of extremely various art activity including a lot of manifestations. For this reason we focus our attention on common features of avant-garde reflecting its specifics as well. Just in this coordinate system street art will be considered.

3. Democratization of Art as a General Basis of Avant-garde and Street Art

One of the attributive features of street art is maximum democracy. Within all period of the art existence artists possessed an exclusive right for creating new images but nowadays the situation has changed. Due to conventional changes in the art world (in the combination with new technological achievements using different gadgets) the possibilities of this kind proved to be available for everyone. The creative process is not a prerogative for professionals any more.

Street art may be considered as an illustration proving famous I.Boys expression that every man is an artist. It is no wonder that amateurs prevail among street artists. Some practices suppose to have some abilities connected with good physical form i.e. come running - depict - run away. At first, it concerns tagging (a tag is a signature of an author which is made by a quick stroke of the pen on urban surfaces).

But democratization of the creative process began long time ago, the manifestation of which is street art and it is connected with avant-garde art forming. Paradoxically, but historical avant-garde is an art which has been considered as elite by public and critics for a long time (for example, X.Ortega-i-Gasseta, K.Greenberg) and it results from the process of art democratization in the middle of XIX century. T.de Duve, art critics and sociologist connects one of the main trends of the modern art with the appearance of saloons in Paris which are alternative to official. Saloon of Outcast (1863) and especially Independent (1884) having motto "neither revival nor jury" significantly changed the art life in Paris [5]. If Academy used to have definite standards of the quality according to which jury chose the works but now anyone can be a participant of the exhibition. It is difficult to understand who an artist can be and if it is necessary to possess any professional qualities in the new situation.

One more paradox concerns avant-garde art opposition -oriented to mass esthetic consciousness, consciousness of "proshlyaks" (A.Kruchenykh) initiates further art democratization. Nowadays everyone has a possibility to be an artist and it occurs due to a tendency initiated by avant-garde as well, it is a change of present conventions regarding a work of art.

4. «All Is Art»!

For unsophisticated public avant-garde works combined hermeticity of the sense and provocativity of the form This fact activated the problem of both a quality of the work and borders of art as a whole. Actually, from the technical point of view many works of avant-garde provoked spectators saying "I can do it too". In the situation when anyone can repeat a work of art (for example, "Linear drawing" Rodchenko (1921) presenting a thick black line being drawn diagonally on a sheet of a paper) a problem concerning criteria of the work evaluation is very actual.

Avant-garde art solved the problem regarding the quality of a work of art as well as the problem of art borders. The only criterion of the work evaluation is a novelty of ideas. Professionalism, technique are put on the back burner which are not obligatory

(the representatives of historical avant-garde were professionals only in the theory at that time).

Due to avant-garde in XX century a new context occurs giving a possibility to consider any object suggested by an artist as a work of art. Almost half of a century will pass before "ready objects" by M.Dushan receive theoretical ground. Institutional theory of art (G. Diki) will defines a work of art as a result of convention between an author and special institutes representing "a world of art". Any object can have a status of a work of art in the case if it presents an artifact and is exhibited in the gallery and included in the catalogue. In the situation of post modernism this idea evolved in the direction of being free from any authorities. Today, according to T.de Duve " art is that I consider to be" [5].

These words can be used for different manifestations of street art.

The range of practices concerning street art are extremely wide. It includes not only images (tags, graffiti, stickers, stencils, murals) but objects (installations, environment) as well as various art practices (performances, happenings). Otherwise, all forms of street activity can be considered in the context of street art. As a matter of fact, street art realizes the idea of historical avant-garde withdrawing both the quality and borders of art. «Everything is art» is a phrase for describing the present circumstances.

One more peculiarity connecting the works of avant-garde and street art is their authenticity. B. Benjamin wrote about changes of work of art in using modern technologies. It lost aura and authenticity. The conception of unique existence of work of art defines it as " here and now" i.e. that it is impossible to reproduce by means of reproducing [1]. Any work of street art is authentic in this context because these two conditions are present immanently.

But a number of specific features of street art work does not allow to put equals sign between it and avant-garde work. According to P.Burger avant-garde denied the category of the individual production in its manifestations considering it as an attribute of autonomous art (i.e. bourgeois art isolated from life) [4]. Street art consequently demonstrates devotion to this way of creating work of art. Practically ready made objects created in M.Dushan way are not found in street art.It is of no small importance that street art artistic component has no any new ideas changing radically the situation in art for the time being. Basically, novelties in the art sphere are connected with using new technologies. Representatives of street art can use works of art including historical avant-garde ones as a source of quoting but they did not create an effect of the revolutionary transformation of art which historical avant-garde had caused before. Partly, Paskal Gilen words clear up this situation "In the world of the modern

art good idea is new idea. But at present in the world of art the more important idea is appropriate. There is no infinite variation and adaptation in the really original idea which are very necessary in the situation of stable connections [8]. The social direction of street art makes it less radical in the esthetic respect. It is important for a street artist that his work would be understandable for a potential recipient. With this purpose an image can be supplemented by a text as it was done by constructors and producers in the situation of proletarian culture forming. In contrast to avant-garde work street art is inclined to the communication with potential spectators.

5. Reception: Who Is an Addressee?

New Saloons performed a revolution in the sphere of art perception as well. First of all, they radically changed a conception of public. If jury significantly formed esthetic preferences of public visiting Paris Saloons but in the situation of the lack of it anyone could express his opinion about art. Thus, an artist loses his idea of what referential group his art is referred to. But a recipient is bewildered. New art requires already not the contemplativeness but the activity from him. He must be an equal participant of the creative process, cocreator of senses which are not given in the ready made form.

In spite of being inspired by a new situation in which the art conventions were lost avant-garde defined quickly an addressee of its art. It was utopian "new man", a man of new sensuality; actually, the authors' like-minded people were an addressee of the new art. Finally, all mankind became an addressee of the new art directly or indirectly, by means of design and architecture. With the help of visual look modern western culture (pretending to become a basis of the world culture) is obliged to avant-garde in many respects.

Street art addressee is not so evident as avant-garde one. At first it is a street crowd as a whole. But at the different stages of street art formation (tagging- graffiti -post graffiti) its every component presents definite, context conditional, reference group. (Although one can hear from the street art representatives that they appeal not to a group but to a separate individual).

At the stage of tagging appeared in 1960 and intended to put an author's signature quickly on some surfaces the main idea of a writer corresponds to the contexts, on the one hand it is ethological i.e. to mark a territory, declare the right on it; on the other hand it is ontological i.e. to inform the world about his existence "I exist". The public who this tag is addressed is the representatives of subcultural or close to criminal youth communities.

At the stage of graffiti appeared in 1960 when there were youth protests existence and protest saying became dominating and was addressed to the wide public. Graffiti manifests some point of view (a separate writer or a group) which expresses their interests. As for graffiti it is necessary to take into consideration the protect component can be present both obviously in the form of saying which is rich in content and non obviously as a fact of the presence of unsanctioned saying (independently on its content) in the public environment. The term graffiti (partisaning, bombing, city guerilla and so on) is associated with non conformism of avant-garde.

At the stage of post graffiti a new context which is humanist, oriented to intimisation of a city and a man relationships appears. The potential like-minded persons become an addressee of street art whom the works of art reveal and unite in the definite social groups "multitude" (in the terminology of M. Hardt and D.Negri). Multitude having come to take the place of mass presents a set of singularities oriented to the united activity. The grounds for uniting can be different such as city equipping with services and utilities, various kinds of entertainment and so on [10].. Street art like avant-garde exceeds the bounds of art and appears as a social practice in every case.

6. Is it Art and/or Social Practice?

Avant-garde has been taken till now as the most ambitious project in the history of art due to indissoluble connection with social practice. Avant-garde is a project not only esthetic and anthropological but social and political (inaccidentally the avant-gardes were addicted to the genre of political literature as a manifest). Otherwise, avant-garde intended to change not only art but it declared its intentions of creating both a new world and a man. It is important to clarify that it is not necessary to understand generally accepted imagination about avant-garde politicization word by word, it is very exaggerated. It is appropriate to use Zh. Ransyer saying that politics and aesthetics are always connected with each other. Any work of art is included in the political context. But art of avant-garde did not coincide with some political movements, its revolutionism lay in the sphere of art and culture. Actually, dadaism, for example, results from the reaction to the First World war, it brings down its enthusiasm not for political forces initiated it but for bourgeois culture creating the conditions for its occurrence. Dadaism gains politicization and critical anti-war direction in the frames of one Berlin group shared communist ideas. Italian futurists tried to elect their candidates in the organs of government and arrange meetings with potential electors which were in the format of epatazh performance. The war which F.Marinetti wrote

as about cleaning procedure, it was a war against culture, its monuments, institutions—such as museums, libraries and so on. The manifest logics of war glorification resulted Marinetti in supporting fascism but this connection of avant-garde representative with the right political course turned out to be unprecedented. In spite of the fact that there were no many politicized avant-gardes but they preferred to support left political movements. As for Russian avant-garde the content which futurists put in the context was very specific. They dreamt of a peculiar revolution, the Revolution of spirit. (V. Mayakovsky, D. Burlyuk, A. Kamensky) which did not occur.

After the revolution the artists began to cooperate with the authority performing its orders mainly of the agitation character. Besides, they did not leave attempts to distance from state interfering in art affairs. Mayakovsky said “Long live art which is free from politics!” [13]. Revolution enthusiasm of avant-garde was directed to not so much for or against concrete political forces as against bourgeois culture. It was not a political revolution but first of all it was aesthetic one.

All mentioned above refers to the soviet art in the less degree. B. Buhloh notes that utilitarian aesthetics connected with it puts works of art in the social context in response to the requirement in the cultural self-education of the industrial and proletarian public [3]. The theorists of the industrial art considered it as a means of transformation of the society by changing a subject of the environment. If avant-garde is considered to be an utopian strategy of creating the new world and a man the industrial art can be interpreted as one of the tactics leading to this purpose.

Unlike avant-garde, street art is not utopian, it is realistic. It is not oriented to the future but to the topicality. In the comparison with avant-garde practices social ones of street art are less ambitious but also they are socially oriented. Firstly, they are conditional upon the aspiration to self-expression; secondly, to the disagreement with sanctioned imagery and predominated vision of the public space [14]; thirdly, to the protest against the capture of public spaces by the authority, firms and corporations, advertisements and so on. The artists would like to return streets to the public of the city. This context is inserted in so called “social turning” in the modern art described by N. Bourriaud. «Social turning »intends to set up socials relations by means of art [2]. In this context social practices of street art are directed to set up relationship with citizens. So, organizers of the international festival “Art-prospect” consider art to be an instrument of involving citizens in the life of the city.

One of the most famous projects of this kind having international popularity is a work of Candy Chag “Before I die”. The artist used the walls of neglected house in New Orleans as a place for public speaking out. She suggested finishing writing with

a chalk using a stencil "Before I die, I want...." The walls were covered with writing on that day, the people were united by not only reflection about the dramatic and uncomfortable topic for a man but the possibility of public speaking out on this connection. The aspiration of street art to the communication (although specific peculiarities taking into consideration predominant anonymity) allows to consider this peculiarity as attributive.

Quite often street art is associated with the political protest. The protest component has been present since the end of 1960. But as it was before, today protest makes an impression as spontaneous, non articulated without suggesting a positive program. It was conditional upon present events but avant-garde was directed towards future. Political street art can be a performance, graffiti or a stencil and so on and it presents one of its numerous contexts. But even non conformism component of street art is hidden irony evidently contrasting with serious intentions of avant-garde. The political context radicalizes street art although it is not appropriate to compare the degree of avant-garde and street art radicality. It lies in different planes. Street art makes speaking out political. Avant-garde and its uncompromising struggle against leaving culture lie in the sphere of aesthetics. Street art is not directed against culture as a whole but against some manifestations connected with social inequality or any forms of oppression.

7. The Place of the Action is a City

One more common peculiarity of both avant-garde and street art is a city as a scene/ background for creating and exhibiting art objects. A city is a place of birth of avant-garde and an attribute of street art out of it a city will lose its specificity. The mass going out of artists to the streets begins in the second half of XX century and reaches its peak development at present days.

The works of street art leave the usual environment, the space of "white cube" (museums, galleries) and enters the city space using different surfaces for creating images presenting both already existing visual environment and creating a new one.

But the idea of going art out of the borders of "white cube" is not new, at first it is realized in avant-garde art. So, Russian futurists appealed writers and artists to refuse from usual places of exhibiting of works of art and exhibit them in the streets. Singing of urbanism they intended "to turn the streets for everybody into the holiday of art" [13]. The examples of the street activity of both artists and poets are not little. The first issue of "A newspaper of futurists" was stuck on the walls of houses. D.Burlyuk also

nailed his pictures to the wall of the house; imaginists renamed Moscow streets in honour of themselves and wrote provocative inscriptions on the walls of Holy monastery; the appearance of painted futurists on the Kuznetsk bridge can be considered as one of the first street performances and today "Okna ROSTa" by Mayakovsky can be identified as street art.

Futurists intended to appropriate a city, possess it. V.Khlebnikov in his text "We and houses" says that the city is ours and the city is yours (or the city of "proshletsov"). The city "our" is full of wonderful houses such as a house Foare on the wheels, a house -swings, a house-a cup and so on [11]. At the same time singing of the city the representatives of avant-garde (before the revolution) realized their actions in the streets from time to time. Later their interference in the city environment had a system character that is according to the order of the authority the artists created a festive decoration of revolutionary holidays (one of the most famous projects of such kind was "suprematic Vitebsk" by K.Malevich).).

Street art works with the city environment consequently and conceptually. Street art reformats the attitude of citizens to the places of living, awakes the interest of them to the usual habitual landscape which can have many surprises. Any imperfection of the city landscape can be decorated fantastically. Examining closely a city which seems to be usual and familiar is turned to the special pleasure, the pleasure of a discoverer.

Accusations in vandalism connected with the city environment are often associated by public with street art. Art of avant-garde was accused in vandalism by both public and art critics. «A dirty person is going» (Repin reacted to a new art in this way); «We are the last barbarians of the old world, we are the first barbarians of the new world» I.Zdanevich exclaimed [12]. The negation of the previous culture in avant-garde takes quite aggressive forms and it is enough to remember such an emblem classical the work of art "Gioconda" by Leonardo in the interpretations of Malevich ("Partial black out with Mono Lisa") and M.Dyushan («L.H.O.O.Q.»). The brutality of means was conditional upon the grandeur of the idea. Avant-garde was in the state of the war with the authoritative paradigm of Cartesian culture.

As for avant-garde both provocation and epataz were the methods of attracting the public attention to principally new ideas both aesthetic and life building.. Regarding street art vandalism is a means of attracting attention to the problems of one or other social group or a writer.

Street art is a zone of a conflict in many manifestations they are the following an artist and city authorities, an artist and citizens who do not always approve of this kind of the activity; an artist and an artist competing for the place in the city space.

The actions of writers quite often are taken for vandalism. (So, F.Fukuyama considered graffiti to be one of the forms of social desorganisation).).

One more topic of the conflict is a readiness for cooperating with the authority. It is a conflict between an artist working according to "the canon of genre" practicing the intervention and an artist-conformist having come into alliance with the authority.. Today street art presents a zone of the emotional tension and for this reason it differs from any other manifestations of modern art due to its energy and vitality.

Apparently, enthusiasm and disinterestedness of street art are related to those features which were characteristic to avant-garde and the commercial success took the last positions in the system of values. The clear expression is a main motivation and at least it was on the initial stage of many street artists activity. As a rule, they do not sign their works and they understand that they create ephemeral works which can be destroyed at any moment. Sometimes they intentionally underline this fragility, for example Swoon creates his works using a carving from the paper which is short-lived.

Street art does not intend to have a commercial success. The artists present their works to a city the materials for which were bought by themselves. But in all fairness, as in proportion the degree of recognition of street artists increases as the temptations of art commercialization grow. Although as a whole a community of street art concerns it negatively but some artists actively cooperate with city authorities realizing their orders. The famous firms very often attract street artists as designers and producers of the advertisement.

Street art is an active component of gentrification process that looks quite odiously. However, there are a lot of examples of unfavourable city districts are turned at first to tourists sightseeing then to respectable ones for ecologically successful citizens after being in the view of artists. So, with this regard to it some small settlements are added to the large cities such as London (Shordich), Berlin (Croytsberg), Dublin (Temple- bar) and so on. Thus, in 2015 a group «Germen Crew» painted the whole district of the small town Pachuka (about 20000 m2) and turned it to a tourist sightseeing.

It is necessary to note that a market commercialized avant-garde the prices for avant-garde works at the auction sale are very impressive.

8. Why Street Art is not Avant-garde?

It seems that there are many points of intersection of avant-garde and street art. Nevertheless, it would be an exaggeration to consider street art to be "avant-garde of present days".

Actually avant-garde became a point of a gap in the history of art. Street art is not already the same, in spite of the its main intentions are conditional upon historical avant-garde having become a fact of the history of art. According to B. Buhloh “... Art entered the post avant-garde stage long time ago. It is characterized by the rehabilitation of the work category and usage of technical methods being born in anti art projects of avant-garde for art purposes” (Buhloh 2016). All mentioned above is related to street art too, very often directly quoting avant-garde works, sometimes using some methods.

In the situation of “soft” culture of post modernism in the context of which street art exists and many specific peculiarities are impossible according to the definition such as art radicalism, intention to change present circumstances using means of art, orientation to “great art” realization and so on. (It is necessary to mention that such kind of reproaches are addressed to “neo avant-garde” and post avant-garde). Nevertheless, a number of specific peculiarities allow to connect it with the cultural field caused by art of avant-garde.

9. Conclusion

Street art is ambivalent as avant-garde and both present not only art but first of all a social practice in the context of which radicalism of street art saying (for example, political) can be surpassed in radicalism of avant-garde saying according to the content. But it is necessary to take into account that radicalism of avant-garde expressed vividly in the sphere of art whereas with this respect, street art presents a part of mainstream from the aesthetic point of view. Indirect confirmation of it narrativity and figurativity, visual effects highly valued by public in art are widely used by street artists. Street art work must be “hooked” in contrast to avant-garde work which is oriented to empathy.

Both from the aesthetic and social, political point of view street art is not equal to avant-garde. No doubt, that this phenomenon of the modern art could not be realized out of the context of the first, historical avant-garde and inspired by it the transformations of a culture, a society, a man. In this sense, street art is founded by avant-garde but it is not avant-garde.

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